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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 001322

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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [BM](#)

SUBJECT: BURMA'S NEW FOREIGN MINISTER: "EXPECT NO CHANGE IN
GOB POLICY"

REF: A. RANGOON 1250

[1](#)B. RANGOON 1237

Classified By: COM Carmen Martinez for Reasons 1.4 (b,d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary: New Foreign Minister U Nyan Win met with the COM on October 5, only his third encounter as FM with a diplomat in Rangoon. By all appearances, Nyan Win is a caretaker foreign minister under instructions from SPDC Chairman Than Shwe to hold the regime line. He declared that the GOB has no intention of changing its foreign policy, reiterating standard SPDC arguments that Burma is misunderstood and that ASSK and the NLD are destabilizing elements. His message is entirely consistent with the SPDC's determined march to complete its road map with a regional stamp of approval, marginalize the democratic opposition, consolidate full control over Burmese territory, and prolong its staying power. We can expect some cooperation on several apolitical bilateral issues, but we have no expectation that the new FM will be responsive on other important policy issues. End Summary.

[1](#)2. (U) On October 5, the COM called on Burma's new Foreign Minister, U Nyan Win. The FM, one of only a few cabinet members to meet with U.S. Embassy officers since new sanctions were imposed in July 2003, was joined by new Deputy Foreign Minister U Maung Myint, Deputy DG Phae Thann Oo, and new Americas Division Director U Paw Lwin Sein. The DCM and P/E chief (notetaker) also participated.

[1](#)3. (SBU) FM Nyun Win's meeting with the COM was only his third meeting with a diplomatic envoy in Rangoon since assuming duties on September 18. Nyun Win has met with the Japanese Ambassador-designate and, on October 5, with the visiting Indian Foreign Secretary. Following his meeting with the COM, the Foreign Minister was scheduled to meet with the Singaporean Ambassador, dean of the diplomatic corps. The new FM joined the GOB delegation to the UNGA last week (and he expressed to the COM gratitude for his last minute visa), where he said he had the opportunity to meet UNSYG Koffi Annan and "explain" the Burma situation.

[1](#)4. (C) Nyun Win--demonstrating minimal though better than expected English language skills--said that he has long been aware of the United States as a superpower and he therefore desired closer cooperation. However, he added, the GOB has no intention of changing its foreign policy. "If the U.S. participates with us," he said, "we will reach our goals quickly." Offering a familiar SPDC argument, he said that Western countries misunderstand Burma and impose sanctions that only inflict suffering upon the Burmese people. "You (the Embassy) are in a better position than your Congress to understand our situation and to explain to Americans that our points of view are not all that different."

[1](#)5. (SBU) The Foreign Minister also criticized the NLD, positing that the West had pressured the GOB to allow NLD participation in the National Convention (NC), but the opposition party then proceeded to boycott and "destabilize the road map process." The GOB, he said, had freed ASSK in the past only to watch her force confrontation and refuse to participate in nation building. "Why don't you push ASSK and the NLD like you push us?" he asked. Nyun Win also complained that the international media portrays an inaccurate view of Burma. The COM quickly retorted that the GOB needed to allow journalists to enter the country. "You might not like everything that gets written," she said, "but access to information is important not only for the outside world, but for the Burmese people as well."

[1](#)6. (SBU) The COM stated that the GOB's road map would lack any credibility whatsoever unless authorities release senior NLD leaders and establish a fixed timeline. "If the GOB is sincere about an inclusive process," she said, "then how can you expect the NLD to participate while their leaders languish in detention?" The COM forcefully pointed out that immediate freedom for ASSK and U Tin Oo was a basic human right and reminded the FM that ASSK was the victim of a premeditated assault on May 30, 2003--not the aggressor, as the GOB has frequently attempted to portray her and the NLD.

[1](#)7. (SBU) The U.S. will not change its Burma policy unless the GOB undertakes serious measures to achieve national

reconciliation, was the message the COM exhorted the FM to deliver to the SPDC. The issue is not just bilateral, she added, and pointed to EU sanctions and the UNSYG's August statement criticizing the NC as examples of international concern. The COM urged Nyan Win to speak with SPDC Chairman Than Shwe about allowing the immediate return of the UNSYG's Special Envoy and the UN Special Rapporteur for Human Rights. (Note: The COM provided the FM with a copy of the Department's October 4 statement on the UNSYG's September 29 Burma meeting. End Note.)

18. (C) Bio notes: Both Nyan Win and his deputy, Maung Myint, were dressed in traditional Burmese civilian clothing, backing reports that they have doffed their military uniforms and taken sabbatical from active duty. DFM Maung Myint made no contributions during the 30-minute meeting and appeared to have minimal or no English language comprehension. The new DFM, according to his junior colleagues, will be in charge only of administrative matters while a second Deputy Foreign Minister, the unimpressive Kyaw Thu, will assume the role of "senior DFM" responsible for most policy matters.

Comment: Caretaker Foreign Minister

19. (C) By all appearances, Nyan Win is a caretaker foreign minister under instructions from SPDC Chairman Than Shwe to hold the regime line. Since the September 18 ouster of the GOB's experienced former foreign affairs team (ref B), the long-time diplomat U Tin Winn, Minister of Labor and concurrently a Minister in the Prime Minister's Office (and former Ambassador to the U.S.), has carried the regime's water to the international community, including in his role as head of delegation to the UNGA and as senior GOB representative at the imminent ASEM Summit in Vietnam.

11. (C) We were not surprised by FM Nyan Win's narrow views or his message that the GOB has no intention of changing its foreign policy. His approach is entirely consistent with the SPDC's determined march to complete the road map with a regional stamp of approval, marginalize the democratic opposition, consolidate full control over Burmese territory, and prolong its staying power. The COM also pressed for appropriate cooperation on our joint opium yield survey, humanitarian remains recovery operations, and the construction of a new embassy compound. We can expect some cooperation on these efforts, but have no expectation that the new FM will be responsive on other important policy issues. End Comment.
Martinez